

The role of family structure in children's sports and exercise-related socialization

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Abstract:

Being important socialization agents, parents may strongly influence the extent to which their child engages in sports and exercise. Due to the absence of a second parent, single parents often face greater barriers (e.g., lack of time and/or financial means) when trying to support their child's sports and exercise engagement. Research indicates, however, that single parents may also provide the resources necessary or compensate for a lack of these to avoid limiting possibilities for their child. Yet, until now the potential strategies and requisite conditions have not been thoroughly examined.

Guided by interactional socialization-theoretical conceptions, this study investigates a) the role of family structure (single vs. two parents) regarding the ways in which parents support their children to engage in sports and exercise and b) the relevance of additional situational factors for children's sports and exercise engagement depending on family structure. Interviews were conducted with parents from single (n=6) and two-parent families (n=13) whose children were at the ages of 7-13, respectively. The constant comparative method was used for analysis.

Preliminary findings highlight that single parents may be able to find ways to adequately support their child's sports and exercise engagement. Attaching differing degrees of significance, parents describe various corresponding situational factors of relevance, including the support they receive from other persons, familial living conditions, number of children, and if applicable, age and gender of children's siblings. Having two parents in the household, in contrast, does not automatically translate to a great amount of parental support.

Keywords: Children, Sports and exercise, Socialization, Family circumstances